

RFK Aim in Taps Probed

11/8/13

By Walter Pincus
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Senate intelligence committee is trying to determine if FBI wiretaps in 1961 and 1962, authorized by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy and carried out under national security procedures, were really designed to gather information to control Congress on sugar legislation.

The 1962 wiretaps, according to committee aides who have been investigating taps by the past five administrations, are the first

they have uncovered in which taps were authorized solely to keep track of activities with regard to legislation.

The committee, in pursuing its investigation, has asked the FBI to supply additional documents on the 14 different taps authorized by Robert Kennedy over the two years.

In July, 1962, at a time when President Kennedy was at odds over sugar legislation with the then chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Attorney General Kennedy authorized the FBI to install seven wiretaps, one

of which was on the residence of the committee's chief clerk, according to documents released this weekend by the intelligence committee.

These 1962 taps, according to a June 26, 1962, memo signed by then FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, were in response to a request from the then Attorney General that the bureau "keep abreast of activities with regard to pending sugar legislation."

According to a Senate committee aide, there is no

See WIRETAPS, A8, Col. 1

WIRETAPS, From A1
reference in the memo to any criminal or national security investigation association with the wiretaps. Nonetheless the bureau handled the wiretaps as national security operations.

Under federal law in effect at that time, information from taps could not be used in any criminal prosecution; consequently, taps were useful only in gathering intelligence information.

The House committee clerk, Christine Gallagher, had been the subject of an earlier FBI

tap, authorized by Attorney General Kennedy less than a month after he had taken office in January, 1961.

On Feb. 14, 1961, FBI Director Hoover sent a memo to Kennedy recommending three Agriculture Department officials and one unnamed foreign target be wiretapped as part of an investigation into foreign government lobbying.

Two days later, according to another released Hoover memo, the FBI director suggested taps be instituted on Mrs. Gallagher and an unnamed American lobbyist. The lobbyist, Hoover wrote,

had just been hired by a foreign government to be "a contact man with high officials of the U.S. government."

Both sets of recommendations were approved, according to committee documents.

In all, seven taps, including one the committee has been unable to pinpoint, were undertaken in 1961.

President Kennedy, in January, 1962, announced his own plan to amend the sugar act that included cutting down on a \$56-a-ton premium that foreign sugar growers

received by selling their sugar in the United States.

Rep. Harold Cooley (D-N.C.), then chairman of the

House Agriculture Committee, opposed that proposal. He exercised, through his position, great influence over how much sugar foreign countries could sell in the United States. All foreign lobbyists made representations to him on behalf of their clients.

On June 19, Cooley's committee approved a sugar bill without the President's suggested reductions, and one day later it was hastily passed

by the House.

On June 26, Hoover sent Attorney General Kennedy a memo that began: "Reference is made to your request that we keep abreast of activities with regard to the pending sugar legislation."

In that memo, Hoover suggested re-establishing the tap on Mrs. Gallagher since "last year (it) produced pertinent information."

Along with the Gallagher tap, Hoover suggested one be set on a lobbyist and five foreign government targets.

Attorney General Kennedy, according to the committee's

documents, signed his approval for the taps on July 9.

By that date, the sugar bill had passed Congress and was in the White House. President Kennedy held up signing the bill until a second measure, containing additional sugar provisions he wanted, had been cleared for a House vote. That came on July 13, and the bill was signed into law the next day.

Intelligence committee aides want to see if reports from the July 9 taps were used in the negotiations between July 9 and 13 with Congress and particularly Chairman Cooley.